

An Exploration of Methods and Challenges in Building Younger Theater Audiences

**TOP
SECRET**

Lucas Erickson

May 2018



Problem: Old Audience and Low Attendance

“Our audience demographic is **old**.”

“We have an **older audience**.”

“This doesn’t always feel like a place a young person would feel comfortable in.”

- Since 2008 attendance rates have **declined** for both musical and non-musical plays (25-44 year olds).
- Non-musical play attendance has **dropped 33 percent** over the last decade.
- The average age of audiences attending classical music performances and jazz concerts are also **increasing**.

* 2012 NEA Survey: Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

Not a big surprise. But these are the facts.



Positionality: Who Is Lucas?

- o I have been involved in theater on and off for pretty much my whole life:
 - o Children's theater
 - o School
 - o Breck School
 - o University of Colorado (BA theater)
 - o University of Minnesota (theater audience development)
 - o Work
 - o Hennepin Theatre Trust
 - o Guthrie Theater
 - o Springboard for the Arts (theater audience development)

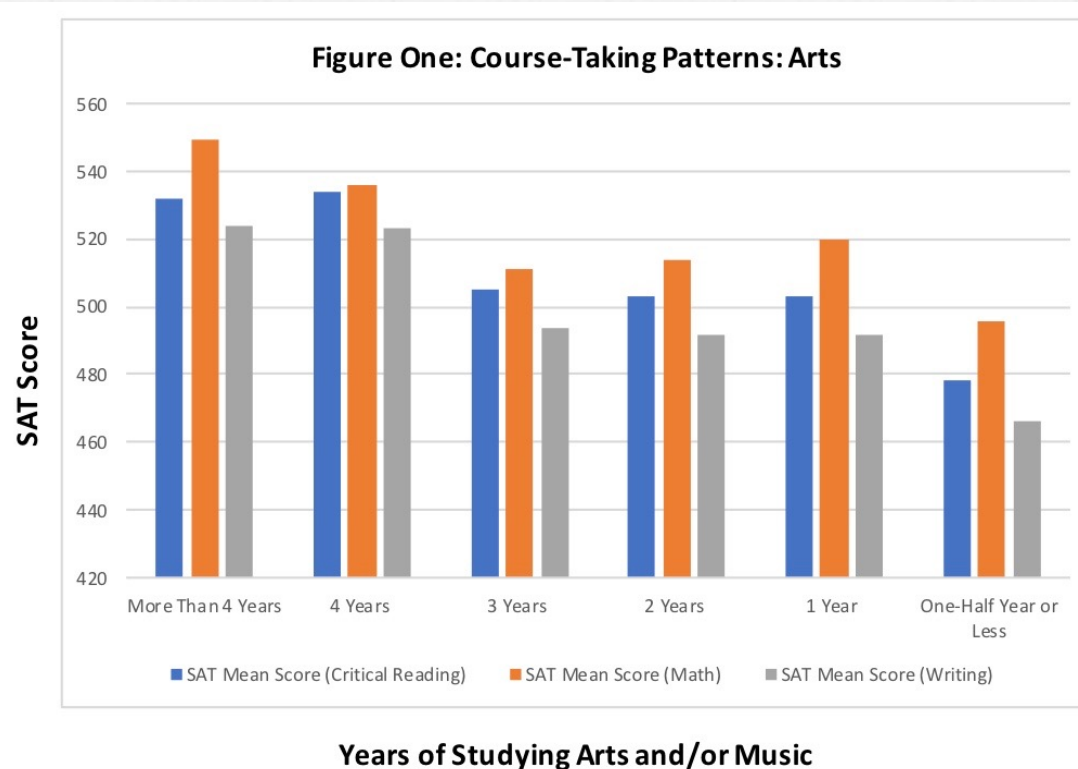


Literature Review: The Value Of Art Education

- o Academic Benefits
- o Enhances Social Skills
- o Adults who attended performing arts as children were **three to four times** as likely to see shows as adults (NEA Survey).
- o * **93%** of Americans think that the arts help give young people a well-rounded education.
- o * **86%** think that arts education improves young people's attitude toward school.
- o * **83%** think that arts education helps young people communicate better with adults. (2005 Harris Poll)

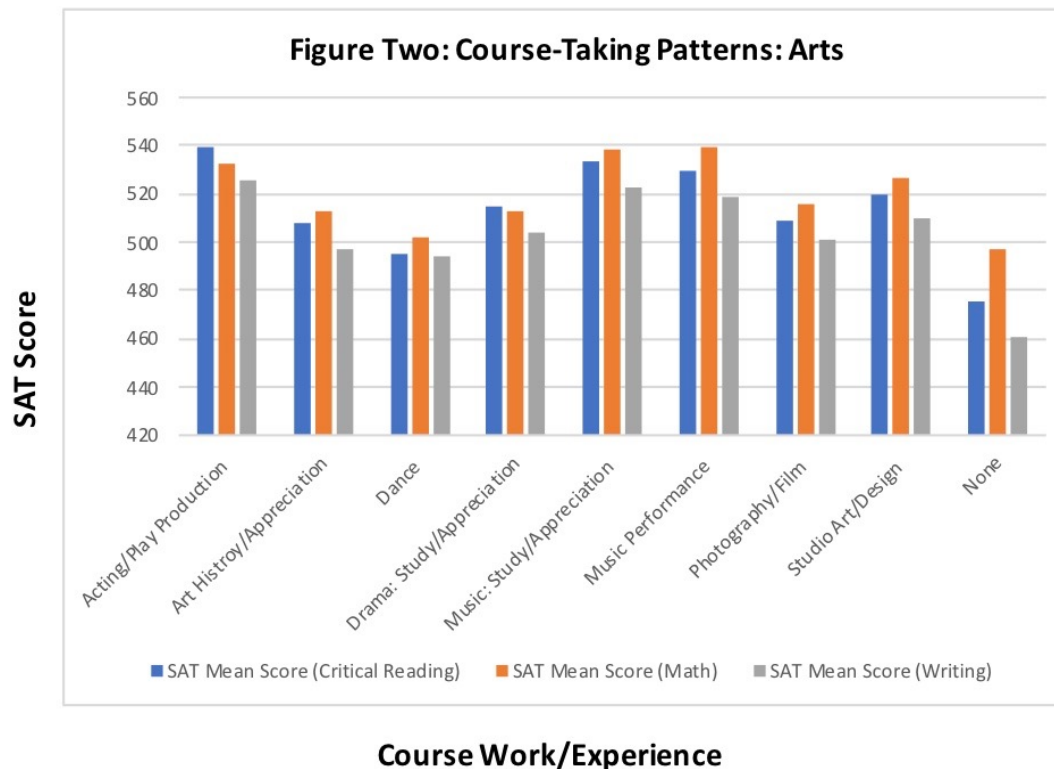


The Value Arts Education



Source: College Board SAT. From 2014, when seniors took the SAT Reasoning Test.
According to the SAT percentile ranks, 500 is approximately the average score.

The Value Arts Education



Source: College Board SAT. From 2014, when seniors took the SAT Reasoning Test. According to the SAT percentile ranks, 500 is approximately the average score.

Theater Workshops

- Content-enhancing and participatory theater classes.
- Hudson River Playback Theater
- Urban Improv
- Improvements with problem solving, communication, and self-confidence.



Capstone Research:

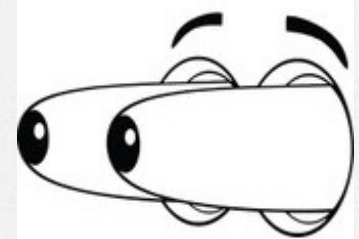
- o *Observations – Theater Workshops and Watching *Hamlet*.
- o *Surveys – High School Students
- o Interviews – Twin Cities Theaters

* Park Square Theatre



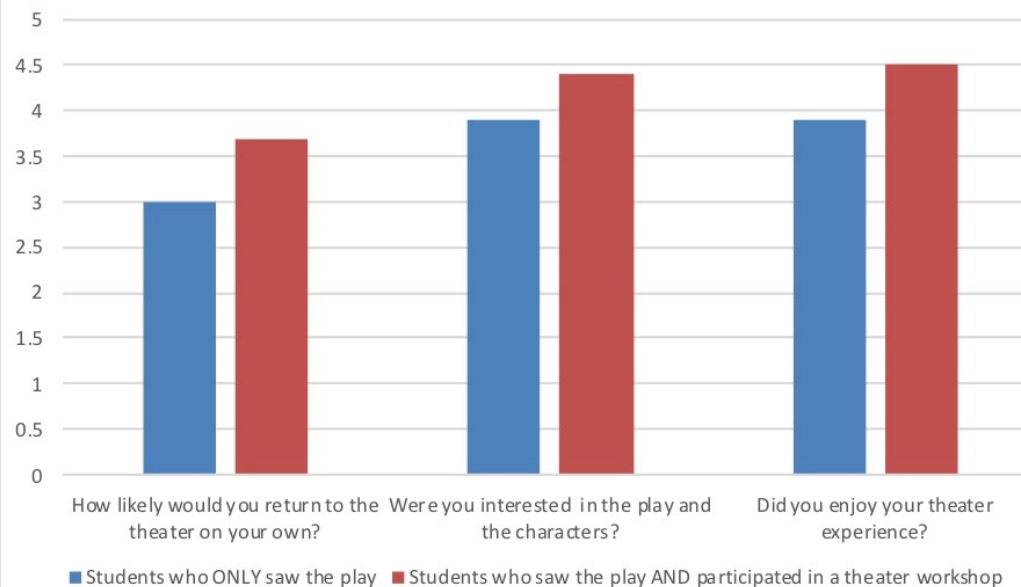
Observations

- o Applied psychologist Albert Bandura's self-efficacy (SE) theory to the dynamics of participating in theater workshops and seeing live theater.
- o A person's belief in his or her own ability to succeed in a given situation.
- o 4 factors that contribute to SE:
 - o Mastery experiences (rehearsing/repetition).
 - o Vicarious experiences (dramatic scene-mirror self esteem).
 - o Social persuasion (positive teacher feedback).
 - o Physiological and emotional states (stretching/movement/theater games).



Student Survey

Figure Three: *Hamlet* Survey



* Students answered on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 5 (strong interest or enjoyment)

* Schools that ONLY saw the play: Red Wing HS, Maplewood Academy HS and Capitol View HS

* Schools that saw the play AND did a theater workshop: Columbia Heights HS and Eden Prairie HS



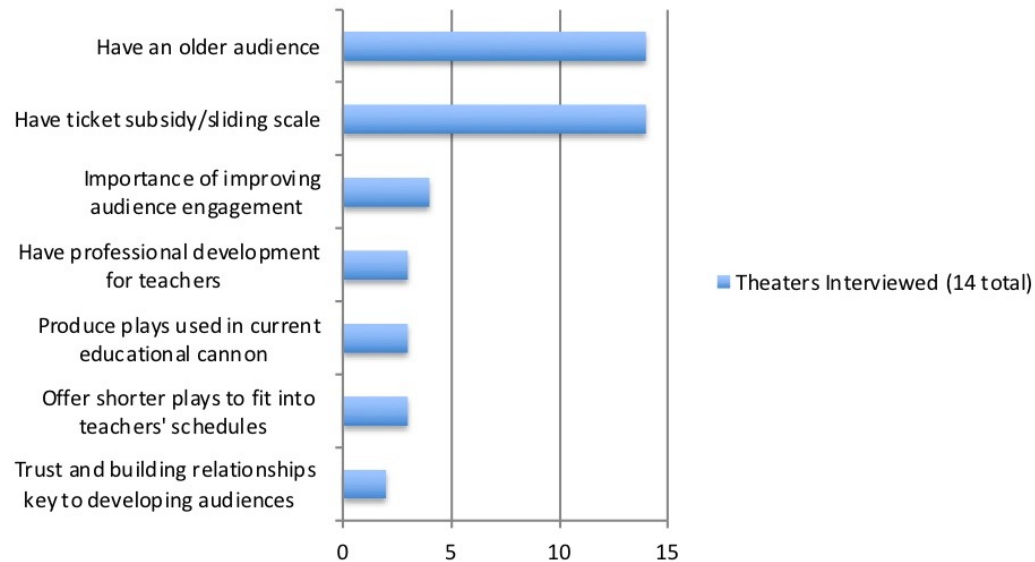
Student Survey

- Preparing students for seeing a play is the way to go (better overall experience, higher level of interest during the play, and strong desire to return to the theater).
- However, the numbers were above the median of 2.5/5 for both groups, suggesting that theater exposure in general has benefits.
- Students that had low prior exposure to theater (Columbia Heights) had an overall better theater experience compared to students that had already been exposed to high amounts of theater (Red Wing, Eden Prairie).



Theater Interviews

**Figure Four: Twin Cities Theater Interviews
Key Findings**



Conclusions

- o Twin Cities theaters are having mixed success in reaching younger audiences.
- o Theaters could and should have a stronger connection to the educational system and to each other (**theater workshops WORK!**).
 - o *Reversing the trend of declining theater attendance rates and lack of young people will be difficult to change.*
 - o *Efforts to create educational networks and programs between schools and theaters will take time and will have high costs.*



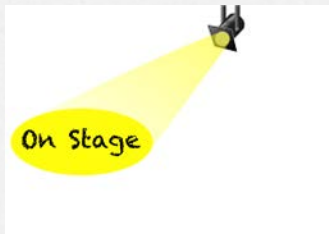
Recommendation #1

- o *Twin Cities Theaters Should Work Together to Create a Youth-Focused Education Network*
 - o Mutually beneficial relationship between theaters and the educational system.
 - o Share resources and ideas b/w competing orgs.
 - o Similar to MN museum networks (Jamee Young).



Recommendation #2

- *Twin Cities Theaters Should Create More Theater Workshops for Younger Audiences in Theaters, Schools and Communities*
 - Some theaters mentioned having post-show discussions with audiences (including student audiences), but not on a regular basis.
 - On Stage - 1,500 students exposed to new theater; 40% paid to see the show discussed in class.
 - *Hamilton*.



Limitations/Future Research

- Limited number of respondents.
 - Non-statistical interviews (no precise or absolute measures).
 - Survey results based on students seeing one play (*Hamlet*).
-
- Look at successful audience building programs outside of Twin Cities.
 - How can technology help bring younger audiences to theaters?



